



Devoted to the Future of You.

Introduction to Carlow University

Mission of Carlow University

Carlow University, rooted in its Catholic identity and embodying the heritage and values of the Sisters of Mercy, offers transformational educational opportunities for a diverse community of learners and empowers them to excel in their chosen work as compassionate, responsible leaders in the creation of a just and merciful world.

Vision of Carlow University

Carlow University will be a preeminent, innovative, Catholic university, renowned for providing transformational learning experiences in which students realize their full potential and become career-ready, ethical leaders committed to a just and merciful world.

Values of Carlow University

MERCY: The identifying value of Carlow University is Mercy, encompassing all that we are and do as a University. Inspired by our God of Mercy, this value urges us to open our hearts to our students, our colleagues, and our world. In the tradition of action and contemplation, we seek practical ways of addressing need and engage in reflection to understand and integrate our experiences. Education offers us the tools to address unjust structures and dehumanizing situations. Each discipline provides a lens through which we can envision our place in our own personal transformation and that of the global community. The values of Service, Discovery, Hospitality, and the Sacredness of Creation further expand our understanding of the power of Mercy to change our world.

HOSPITALITY: In Hospitality we welcome the wholeness of each person, creating a space in our campus community for all individuals with their varied beliefs, cultures, orientations, and abilities. Openness to the gifts and perspectives of all creates a community that is rich in diversity and committed to inclusion.

SERVICE: The value of Service calls us beyond ourselves to prioritize the needs of others over our own self-interest. Our efforts to identify and respond to the needs we see around us lead us to interact with people and institutions in ways which are transformational. Our spirit of compassion leads us to practical action on behalf of those in need.

DISCOVERY: Through Discovery we open ourselves to the totality of our human experience, to the educational enterprise, to our relationship with the Divine, and to the wonders of the world in which we find ourselves. Discovery energizes our intellectual curiosity and desire for learning. It leads us ever deeper into the engagement with our chosen discipline and engenders a spirit of curiosity and awe at the complexity and variety of creation.

SACREDNESS OF CREATION: This value leads us to respect for each person and for all of creation. In gratitude for the beauty and variety of our world and its inhabitants, we commit to a culture of sustainability and to the preservation of a world where all are revered, and all may thrive.

Introduction to the Carlow MSOT Program

Carlow University was founded by the Sisters of Mercy and guided by the Mercy Values: mercy, sacredness of creation, hospitality, discovery, and service. This work guides the OT program to support students as adult learners to become powerful citizens of justice in society and healthcare. Small classes and individualized attention to student learning and diversity are integrated to develop the whole person for innovative practice in healthcare. A whole health perspective is taught throughout the OT curriculum and shared with campus and community agencies. Carlow OT prepares students with intentional integration of interprofessional learning experiences into both course- and community-based learning opportunities. Shared spaces and faculty create daily IP interactions, while critical thinking and ethics courses provide IP discussion and reflection. To create a fair and balanced society, we must advance toward “an occupationally-just world by enabling the empowerment and social inclusion of populations who routinely experience social exclusion” (Nilsson & Townsend, 2010, p. 57).

Mission

The Carlow University Program in Occupational Therapy offers an interprofessional, transformative educational opportunity to a diverse, socially responsive community of learners in order to prepare them as ethical, innovative leaders in healthcare, dedicated to optimizing health and wellbeing as a path to occupational justice.

Vision

The Program in Occupational Therapy will be recognized for educating innovative, ethical occupational therapists with a focus on health and wellbeing as a path to occupational justice and a bridge to transform healthcare delivery to meet the diverse needs of all people, communities, and populations.

Philosophy of Education

The Carlow University OT program educational philosophy aligns with AOTA’s recommendations for OT curriculum, integrating strategies which promote integration of hands-on experiences, active learning, and problem-solving into didactic education (AOTA, 2021). The overall curriculum developmental sequence utilizes experiential learning and critical thinking and builds upon previous knowledge in order to create connections that will bridge the way to new understanding of self, the world, and the art and science of occupation. The concept of occupational justice and promoting equity in health and well-being for optimal occupational engagement drives the meaning and intention of all educational initiatives in the MSOT

program at Carlow University.

Foundations of Occupational Therapy Practice

The OT program believes that students are occupational beings and occupation is a right and necessity for all people. "All people have an innate need and right to engage in meaningful occupations throughout their lives... Participation in occupations influences development, health, and well-being across the lifespan" (AOTA, 2025). Occupation, as a social determinant of health, is facilitated through the just promotion of health and wellbeing for all people, communities, and populations.

Foundational Views of Humanity

The OT faculty believe people can grow and develop when they have access to a foundation of health and well-being. Health enables engagement in occupation and meaningful occupation provides the basis for health and satisfying human needs (AOTA, 2025). Occupational engagement and justice are developed and enhanced by addressing the needs of the "whole person" and attending to the mind, body, and spirit within a social and cultural context. Students are seen as adult learners with a diverse body of gifts, talents, and lived experiences. Students are viewed as balanced, occupational beings, with self-care and health management as priority occupations in the building of knowledge and professional identity in their educational experience.

Humanism Theory

Humanistic education principles "are well suited to educate students about unsustainable human lifestyles and its consequences to human health and well-being as the principles are premised on the idea of respect for human rights, including the right for learners to express their own opinions and values" (Huss et al., 2020, p. 1098). Our educational philosophy begins with an understanding that all people, including our students, must have access to a foundation of health and well-being as a precursor to occupational engagement (Bass et al., 2017). In occupational therapy, wellbeing is defined as the satisfaction with participation in occupations and daily activities that enhance quality of life (QoL) (AOTA, 2020). This means that students must engage in a balance of occupations on their path of learning and fulfillment.

Transformational Learning

Transformational Learning focuses on changing how learners think about the world around them, and in the process, changing the way they think about themselves (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Our program desires to develop socially conscious citizens and healthcare professionals. As students learn about occupation and occupational justice, they begin to see themselves and the world through a new lens. Learners use critical thinking to reflect on experiences, understand the past, and prepare for future action.

OT Program Goals

1. Provide a quality educational experience in order to recruit and develop socially conscious learners who are competent, ethical, and sensitive health professionals.
2. Cultivate an innovative, learner-centered curriculum which promotes interprofessional (IP) practice, occupational justice, health and well-being, and the development of critical thinking and evidence-based clinical practices.
3. Promote and develop collaborative learning which fosters an atmosphere of dedication to occupational justice to benefit the university, student body, and local community.
4. Enhance the financial stability of the program to support the successful achievement of the mission of the university and the OT Department.

Curriculum Design

The curriculum was developed from the established mission and educational philosophy of the Carlow Occupational Therapy program and is grounded in core values of Carlow University. The major program themes integrated across the curriculum include *occupational justice, health and wellbeing, professional identity, interprofessional practice, evidence-based practice, innovation and technology, and environment and community*.

The transformational theory supports the overarching theme of *occupational justice*, the humanistic theory supports the foundational theme of *health and wellbeing*, and both serve to drive the curriculum sequencing and instructional design. The path of transformational learning begins with a professional foundational semester where students learn about themselves and the healthcare team and begin to view the world through a lens of occupational justice (*professional identity* and *interprofessional practice*). Students move to discovering the tools and skills of practice and the science of occupation (*evidence-based practice* and *innovation and technology*) and continue learning by applying this knowledge to the environment and community through Level II Fieldwork and ultimately clinical practice (*environment and community*). All threads are woven throughout the curriculum to develop each concept, provide hands-on learning experiences, and opportunities for critical thinking and reflection.

OCCUPATIONAL JUSTICE

Mercy



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Sacredness of Creation

Professional Identity (Hospitality)

Hospitality focuses on the wholeness of each person and the openness to the gifts and perspectives of all. It is important to know who you are and your unique strengths, gifts, and talents, and understand the lens through which you view the world. The distinct value of occupational therapy's person-centered focus, the use of occupation as intervention, the ethical foundation of practice, and the gifts and perspectives of professional identity, are explored and developed throughout the program. Students are asked to reflect upon their own personal and professional values and attitudes as they progress through the curriculum. Ethics and standards of professionalism are emphasized throughout the program through academic experiences and in advising sessions focused on professional behavior feedback. Additionally, students incorporate professional identity with the concept of therapeutic use of self through classroom activities, fieldwork assignments, and post-experience reflection activities.

Interprofessional Practice (Hospitality)

The concept of Hospitality extends beyond our own personal and professional gifts and perspectives. It is essential to appreciate and welcome the ideas and talents contributed by our neighbors. Part of the Carlow difference is a focus on interprofessional education in order to promote interprofessional practice. The Sisters of Mercy profess that Hospitality is "why we celebrate diversity of background and belief, and why we insist that every member of our community has something vital to contribute" (Carlow University, 2025, para. 7) and it is essential to learn and work as a team with an openness to all perspectives. Interprofessional learning brings students together from various disciplines within the College of Health and Wellness, supporting practical application of knowledge within an interprofessional practice model.

Evidence-Based Practice (Discovery)

The value of Discovery is described as a "spark of curiosity that drives us to ask questions, the creativity

that leads to innovation, and the courage to venture into unknown territory” (Carlow University, 2025, para. 11). In a dynamic and fast-paced world, students need to be able to think critically to solve problems of living as they present barriers to full participation in occupations. Thinking should be guided by evidence-based reasoning for future practice, a combination of evidence gathered from literature, lived experience, and the needs and goals of the clients with whom they work. The OT program stresses evidence-based practice by teaching students to identify and prioritize problems, choose and apply theories and frames of references appropriately, and create reasoned treatment plans that are appropriate to a variety of contexts. This requires identification and evaluation of published evidence along with consideration of experiential evidence, the contextual nature of the client's world, and the dynamic relationship between these elements to guide decision making. Through case studies and fieldwork experiences, students reflect and use their reasoning skills to navigate real-world situations and develop innovative solutions to the everyday problems that clients encounter.

Innovation and Technology (Discovery)

Discovery is defined by intellectual curiosity and a desire for learning (Carlow University, 2025). Living out this value requires an intention to seek roads less traveled. Peloquin (2005) refers to the occupational therapy professional as a “pathfinder... who honor occupation in disintegrating environments are pathfinders. When challenges of all kinds notwithstanding, we affirm the belief that time, place, and circumstance open paths to occupation, we enact the courage of our profession” (p. 620). Innovation and technology represent new paths to occupational engagement. Innovation occurs when the occupational therapist engages and adapts the path to occupational engagement or collaborates with the person to explore evidence-based technology to facilitate their full potential. “We see everyday activities as a making of lives and worlds, a broader and deeper view than that of mere performance or function, and one steeped in opportunity” (Peloquin, 2005, p. 622).

Environment/Community (Service)

Service is a core value of Carlow and the OT program. It is recognized that potential can be enhanced or diminished by the power of the environment to influence health and well-being as a foundation for occupational engagement. To serve effectively, there is a need to create community partnerships in order to understand and reflect the strengths and needs of the citizens. Service extends beyond experiential learning for our students, representing a path to personal growth and professional development. The curriculum design includes a didactic course series dedicated to understanding and influencing the environment and community. The program includes course-based and program-based service-learning opportunities, as well as integrated Level I Fieldwork opportunities in traditional, community-based, and international settings.

Program Student Learning Outcomes

Our educational goals describe what our MSOT students will demonstrate upon completion of their learning experiences. The goals flow from and support the mission statement and the curricular design, threads, and sequence are the vehicles used to ensure the achievement of these goals.

<i>University Values</i>	<i>Program Themes</i>	<i>Student Learning Outcome (SLO)</i>
Mercy	Occupational Justice	SLO 1: Promote and advocate for occupational justice and the power of occupational engagement for individuals and communities to prevent illness and disability, increase meaningful participation, and maintain health.
Sacredness of Creation	Health and Wellbeing	SLO 2: Convey respect and sensitivity for the sacredness of creation and the belief that all human beings have a right to reach their maximal potential through self-care and engagement in healthy living occupations.
Hospitality	Professional Identity	SLO 3: Demonstrate a strong professional identity through an understanding of theoretical knowledge base that is foundational to the practice of occupational therapy and demonstrate competence in entry-level skills of contextual assessment, occupation-based treatment planning and intervention, documentation and team collaboration.
Hospitality	Interprofessional Practice	SLO 4: Demonstrate the standard of interprofessional collaborations through critical thinking, ethical integrity, accountability to outcomes, and successful partnerships.
Discovery	Evidence-Based Practice Innovation and Technology	SLO 5: Demonstrate use of critical thinking to find new pathways to overcoming barriers to occupational engagement using evidence-based reasoning strategies and tools to adapt, modify, and respond to the current and future occupational needs of individuals, communities, and populations.
Service	Environment and Community	SLO 6: Demonstrate service to the community with respect for diversity, a commitment to equity, and a focus on inclusion, to develop a culture of health and occupational justice for all people, communities, and populations.

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Suppl. 2), 7412410010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001>
- American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). (2021). Occupational therapy curriculum design framework. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75(Suppl. 3), S541-S579. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2021.75S3008>
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2025). The philosophical base of occupational therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 79(Suppl. 3), 7913410200. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2025.79S301>
- Bass, J., Baum, C. M., & Christiansen, C. (2017). Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP): An occupation-based framework for practice. In P. Kramer, J. Hinojosa, & C. Royeen (Eds.), *Perspectives on human occupation: Theories underlying practice* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis.
- Carlow University. (2025, December 2). *Five values, one community: Carlow's shared purpose*. <https://www.carlow.edu/five-values-one-community-carlows-shared-purpose/>
- Howie, P., & Bagnall, R. (2013). A beautiful metaphor: transformative learning theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 32(6), 816–836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2013.817486>
- Huss, N., Ikiugu, M., Hackett, F., Sheffield, P., Palipane, N., and Groome, J. (2020). Education for sustainable health care: From learning to professional practice, *Medical Teacher*, 42(10), 1097-1101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1797998>
- Nilsson, I. & Townsend, E. (2010). Occupational justice: Bridging theory and practice. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 17, 57-63. <https://doi.org/10.3109/11038120903287182>
- Peloquin, S. M. (2005). The 2005 Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture—Embracing our ethos, reclaiming our heart. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 59, 611–625. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.59.6.611>